

Young heroine triumphs in stage adaptation of Hans Christian Andersen's 'The Snow Queen'

By LILY DAYTON
 Herald Correspondent

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It's rare that a classic fairytale features a female heroine in a central role. But Hans Christian Andersen's "The Snow Queen" does just that.

And not only is the heroine a young girl, but her style of combat has more to do with understanding her adversary than with killing the enemy.

Monterey Peninsula College's 2011 Storybook Theatre concludes with Stuart Paterson's adaptation of Andersen's timeless tale. "The Snow Queen" opens Friday night, with a preview tonight (Thursday), at Carmel Middle School at the mouth of Carmel Valley.

Directed by Laura Coté, the production features an ensemble cast of MPC students, both current and former, as well as local performers.

Lead performers include Lela Folk as Gerda; Sam Fife as CobWeb; Deena Welch as the Snow Queen; Oliver Banham as Scruff, Twitch, and Reindeer; and Vonda Harris as Bhima, the African Magician and Goddess of the Sun.

First published in 1845, "The Snow Queen" was one of Andersen's longest works — and one considered by many to be his best.

In this adventure tale of good versus evil as experienced through the eyes of a child, the Snow Queen desires to take over the world and make winter last forever.

To accomplish her goal, she captures young Kay, freezing his heart and whisking him away to her Palace of Ice. Her reign doesn't last long, however, as Kay's adopted sister, Gerda, sets off in pursuit of her kidnapped brother.

Along the way, Gerda enlists the

help of the magical animals of the forest and together they make their way to the Palace of Ice, where their quest is to melt Kay's frozen heart and free the world from the Snow Queen's winter domain.

"I liked the idea of a female heroine," said Coté, when asked why she was attracted to directing this show. "This was one of Hans Christian Andersen's more critically acclaimed stories, but at his time this was very pronounced. Having a female heroine was unique."

And as far as why she chose this particular adaptation to work with, Coté said, "It's been hallmarked as one of the best children's scripts in the past decade. It has a lot of humor and a lot of magic — that is the formula that enchants the children in the audience."

Children should also be enchanted by the colorful cast of animal characters in this show, with everything from polar bears and reindeers to ravens.

Adding to the magic of the show, set and costume elements are abstract suggestions of this fantasy world.

For the set, swathes of fabric are draped to evoke various locations. Costumes are subtle; for example, the ravens are portrayed with half-masks that the actors don in conjunction with birdlike movements.

"Children have a way of allowing the magic of theater to transform them," said Coté. "They will



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know it's a person dressed up as a polar bear, but their imagination allows them to believe that it's a polar bear."

Fife, who has been in several Storybook Theatre productions, said that one of his favorite things about performing in children's theater is the chance to do "bigger," more exaggerated acting performances than in typical adult theater.

"Because it's for children, I get to interact with the audience more," he said, explaining that he especially enjoys this production because he plays an archetypal villain role as the Snow Queen's henchman. "I get to be ridiculously villainous and not so coy about it."

After playing in many classic productions with male heroes, Fife said that it's refreshing to be in a play with a story arc that relies on a heroine.

"The way she overcomes obstacles is by understanding others, and by friendship," he explained. "(Whereas) the typical hero fights his enemy and conquers him in battle, she touches their hearts and makes them rethink their lives. They start to wonder about their choices and see the error of their ways. She gets to do things most heroes don't. She connects with the characters around her, forming strong bonds along the way."

Indeed, Coté said that it's the heroine's bond with her brother that fuels the magic that allows Gerda and her animal friends to ultimately triumph over evil.

"This empowers a young girl to believe she can do anything, to not be afraid," Coté added. "A lot of literature isn't written that way. It's nice to have a female save the day."

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THEATER OPENING

•What: MPC Storybook Theatre presents "The Snow Queen"

•Where: Carmel Middle School, 4380 Carmel Valley Road, half a mile east of Highway 1 at the second traffic signal

•When: Previews at 7p.m. Thursday, Nov. 3; opens at 7p.m. Friday, Nov. 4; Continues at 7p.m. Fri-Sat with 3p.m. Saturday and Sunday matinees through Nov. 20

•Tickets: \$9-\$15, with group discounts available, at MPC Box Office (646-4213) 3-7 p.m. Wednesdays, 3-5p.m. Thu-Fri, and two hours prior to each show, or online at www.TicketGuys.com

•Information: 646-4213

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